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Chargers Week 13 Media Availability

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OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR JOE LOMBARDI

On the Bengals' defense:

"They're really well-coached. They have a good scheme. They mix it up, it causes issues. They play really well together. I don't know if there are any superstar names on that defense, but I think that they're all really solid players that play well together. No real weakness that sticks out on film. A good group of players that are coached well and are playing well."

On his assessment of the run game:

"I think that you said it; unbalanced. A lot of that is making sure that we're staying committed to it. I think we said it before, there have been times this season where it's been huge and other times where, like a lot of things, times where it's going well, sometimes you wish you were going better. Overall, I trust the run game, if that makes sense? There are times where I wish, maybe, we would have run it a little bit more. Overall, I think it's good, but we always wish that it was going better."

On developing the running backs group behind of RB Austin Ekeler:

"Hopefully, as those guys get more opportunities, they get in more of a rhythm. I think that we feel really good about how Austin has been playing. We're waiting on those guys to see who emerges within that second group. That's certainly a part of it. We trust those guys. As you get enough reps, they'll get in a rhythm and get a little bit more efficiency going."

On starting G Senio Kelemete at left guard last week:

"From practice, we went with the experienced guy in Senio. We feel real optimistic about [G/T] Brenden [Jaimes], but it's just kind of that rookie/veteran type of thing where, for the short term, that we were hoping that it was going to be, we just kind of went with the veteran guy."

On Jaimes' development:

"As you get into the season, those guys are running scout team. Staying after practice with the O-line guys and getting a little extra individual [work], they keep refining their skills because, maybe, they're not playing reps on gameday. It's a chance for them to focus a little bit more in the weight room. There's really a developmental process with those guys. We had a number of practice squad guys that ascended to be real good starters. That's one of the major jobs of an O-line coach, developing those young guys that might not be ready as a rookie. It's such an experience job and such a developmental job, being an offensive lineman, for most guys. There are exceptions, like [T] Rashawn [Slater], that just come in ready to plug in and play, but most of those guys take a year or two to get a little more strength in the weight room and work on their fundamentals and their technique, just knowledge of the game and anticipation of what's going to happen. That usually takes a little bit of time."

On if playing too early could 'slow a player's development':

"It depends on your mental resiliency. I think that's part of it. As coaches, sometimes we kind of lean on thinking that we know what we're going to get from someone and knowing how to plan around that. But that being said, we're really optimistic on Brenden [Jaimes] and his development."

On the connection between QB Justin Herbert and TE Jared Cook:

"I think it's good. I know that early in the season, the numbers bore that out a little bit more through practice and training camp. He's an easy guy to throw to, so I think it's a good connection. I think Justin is real comfortable throwing to him."

On T Storm Norton and G Michael Schofield III:

"I think that those guys battle every week. They're pros. There's something comforting knowing what you're going to get out of a player and knowing how to plan around their strengths and their limitations. Everyone in the NFL has a bad rep or two, and I know that those get highlighted sometimes, but I think that those guys are giving us everything that they have. They're playing well enough for us to play winning football."

On the Cincinnati edge rushers:

"I know [Bengals DE] Trey [Hendrickson] a little bit. He was in New Orleans for a long time. He's a guy that is coming at you every single play. He is a guy that you know that you're getting his best play every single play. There's something about that consistency and that kind of effort that leads into the kind of production that you're seeing out of him. He's a talented guy, but also a guy that's never taken a play off, even in practice. 94 [Bengals DE Sam Hubbard] on the other side, there are some similar traits there. There are some really talented guys turn it on at times. Those guys are turning it on all the time. If you look at their tangible numbers, their 40-yard-dash times, all of those things, they may not be as high as other guys, but because of the consistency of their effort, you can see it in the results of their pass rush. They're pretty good players."

On if the drops have become a concern:

"Every time, it's a concern, right? What's the answer to it? We're not replacing any of these guys. We know that they're good players. Overall, they're performing really well. It's just trusting the process, getting back to work, getting on the JUGS a little extra, catching from Justin [Herbert] a little extra. You can't put Stickum on their gloves or anything like that. There's a body of work. You trust these guys. I think that it will come around. Everyone has drops. Obviously, we may have more than our share. I don't know the exact numbers. Some of them have come at critical times. It's just something that I think will, in the long run, work itself out. I know that it's frustrating in the short run. We're working on getting that extra work on the JUGS to try to fix it."

On working toward consistent performances:

"I think that there's a consistency element that we're chasing. Hopefully, as we move on and get more experienced together, that will work itself out. That would be the frustrating thing. Like you said, overall, you get the stat sheet and things look pretty good, but there are stretches in certain games where it's just not coming together like we hoped it would. Just keep chasing those good performance and that consistency. As you watch the film and you see why something happened, I think that experience is going to go a long way in creating more consistency."

On if he is 'looking for more explosive run plays':

"Other than consistency, getting bigger plays in the run and pass game — more explosive plays — it makes it easier to score points when you get explosive plays, so those are things that we are always looking for. In the run game and pass game, we would like to increase our explosive play ratio."

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR RENALDO HILL

On the defense:

“Continuing to grow, I think we are improving in every area that we need to. We talked about the run game and how we want to play things. We are doing that a lot better. We are still seeing a play here and there, but I am seeing the progression of us playing the way we want to play it. We know it’s December and we know we need to take a huge jump moving forward so that is the focus leading into the week. We are at the start of December and if we want to be playing into the Januarys and Februarys then we have to take a major leap. I am seeing their improvement every week and I am happy with where it’s going.”

On S Derwin James Jr.:

“I mean, he’s a leader. He’s always at the right place at the right time. If there is an opportunity for him to make the play, then he is going to make it. I think that’s the biggest thing he talks about is just get the ones that come to you. He’s focused on that and every time the ball has been in his area, he’s made a play on it. That’s the player he is — he believes he is going to make it in those moments.”

On third down defense:

“That has been a big focus this week, as well. Obviously, we wanted to go back and look to see what we were doing before the bye because we thought we were in a pretty good position. When we really rolled down the film and looked at it again last night, it really came down to assignment and technique. If we can execute those things, then we’ll be sitting a lot better. Obviously, we are going to be facing a lot of teams and they are going to do a lot of different things with their scheme, but if we focus on the things that we need to do in order to execute, we’ll be fine. Just getting back to that and making sure that’s the focus for this week.”

On missing pieces due to injury:

“It’s part of the NFL. Every team is going through it. We can’t make that excuse, we just have to be good as coaches and make sure that everybody is tied in and it has to be a big emphasis on our part to make sure that our guys can communicate well and execute when they are out there on third down. I won’t hold that one, as far as letting it be a crutch, because every team is going through it. We just have to be better in our moments. Those guys get a lot of reps. We had a lot of reps in the spring. We hope that can carry over to what we are doing on Sunday. A lot of the time when you go through the spring, guys are servicing each other, but we try to make sure that we do a good job of getting the guys working. We are going to continue to work. When we are in those moments, we have to get our assignment done, have good technique so that we can execute get off the field. We know what to do when. We need to get the ball back to our offense.”

On allowing the Broncos to run the ball efficiently in the first half:

“It comes down to those little things; a guy here or there are out of place. It comes down to the execution. When we look at the tape and go back and look where those yards came from, it’s only four plays, really. That really expressed itself. We know that we can play good defense because we showed the same call, where, maybe, we didn’t execute it. Same exact play that we went out and executed later. It has to be focus and it has to be attention to detail in those moments so that everybody is doing their job and we can get off the field.”

On Bengals RB Joe Mixon:

“He’s a strong runner. He’s different than [Steelers RB] Najee [Harris], who was a little bit longer. He’s really compact and he runs hard. He has good [run] tracks behind those guys at the front. He holds it, and once he sees the clear lane, he’s hitting it. He’s a strong guy. It’s going to take all of us to get this guy corralled this week. He takes good care of the ball, that’s one strong straight with him; he doesn’t turn the ball over. We have to make sure we continue to take our swipes and try to get the ball, but we have to make sure that we secure him first.”

On the rotation of the defensive line:

“I think [Defensive Line Coach] Giff [Smith] and [Run Game Coordinator/Outside Linebackers Coach] Jay [Rodgers] do a good job of having a strong rotation with those guys. I don’t ever feel like we’re fatigued nothing has been mentioned to the players about it, they seem to be pretty fresh. They do a good job, I think, of rotating those guys. Going into the game whatever is best for our plan that’s kind of what we will do. I think we’ve been handling it pretty well, as far as the rotations with those guys up front.”

On the snap distribution along the defensive front:

“We’ll keep looking at those things. Those guys do a good job. Sometimes it comes down to the packages, as well. [DL] Jerry [Tillery] is in most of the packages, but when you add a [LB] Kenneth Murray [Jr.] and some other guys into the package, it may change the rotation up front. We’ll keep continuing to do the things that we do. Those guys have earned it, but we are going to focus on what we do. We’ll leave it up to Giff [Smith] and Jay [Rodgers]. I think they do a good job of handling that.”

On areas in which CB Tevaughn Campbell can improve:

“Assignment and execution. Assignment, technique, executing the gameplan out there. We know that things are going to happen. He’s going against a talented receiving corps each week. I just want those guys to continue to play with good effort, continue to challenge, don’t back down. Plays will come. We have to do a good job, on our end, of making sure that we move the down around a little bit to help those guys, as well. We’ll continue to focus on that. Just keep bringing it and stepping up to the plate. That’s what we are going to ask of him. He’s working and grinding hard in practice to make sure that he corrects some of those things that may have sown up in the game. We feel good about him going into the game each week. He has a lot in his body. We just want him to continue to bring it to the game.”

On utilizing blitzes:

“I think that you have to have a mixture. It’s easy to sit there and say that we are going to play technique. That can wear down your guys up front. When you don’t have some of your pieces, you have to move those guys so that they’re not sticking on it. I think we have to do both, where we are moving and sometimes being firm in those situations and playing straight ahead. I just don’t think that there is one way that you can go into the game. If there is a pressure or something that we need to do for a run stop, we’ll call it. We have those ready and dialed up. We are going to just try and execute our gameplan.”

On the value of CB Chris Harris Jr. in the slot:

“He’s a bigger communicator on the inside lane. We trust Chris being in there, running the show from that perspective. Obviously, [CB] Asante [Samuel Jr.] was emerging before the injury. We wanted to keep things the same moving forward. I think it was a comfort level for the players, as well as the coaches, on how we had things, making sure that we have guys for the long stretch. We talked about playing into the playoffs, we are going to need bodies. He was already having the shoulder, so we just wanted to make sure that we were doing things right by our players, as well.”

RUNNING BACK AUSTIN EKELER

On practice this week:

“Practice has been good. We’ve switched up our routine a little bit as we’re getting later into the year. We’re trying to conserve, but also make the most of our time out there on the field. I like the switch-up that we did. It’s been shorter, but it has period where we focus on the specific thing that we’re trying to get out of this drill. It’s about making sure that we’re hitting our keys. It’s good so far. Guys are putting in the time when it comes to meetings and when it comes to going home. That’s where a lot of the development comes together. Then, on the field, it is expected that you already know what you’re doing. It’s good so far. Putting together another day today. Hopefully, we can build on that.”

On Head Coach Brandon Staley adjusting the practice schedule:

“We’re getting later into the season. Before we were doing this walk-through schedule I think [Director of Sports Performance] Coach [Anthony] Lomando said, ‘Instead of doing a walkthrough, let’s cut down the time period and focus on a short burst of plays.’ I think it’s definitely going to help us get an edge and continue to get our tempos down, staying at the highest speed as opposed to lowering the tempo all the way down for the whole duration.”

On preparing for the Bengals:

“The Bengals, in general, have been flipped from last year. Obviously, [Bengals QB] Joe Burrow has been a big part of that, offensively. Their defense has been stepping up in the run game. Their front is really tough and physical. They bring a zero blitz that people need to have to plan for because it can cause other people problems. I think it comes down to us executing. That’s how it’s always been for the Chargers, especially this year. We’re ready for all those zero [blitzes]. Were ready for their man pressures and a few zone pressures in there. They are going to cover some man. We have to win. It’s similar to last week in Denver. I know they are going to play me in man on third down, so I have to get open. Let’s not just get open, but make some type of explosive action out of this, as well. That’s what it’s going to come down to: How many plays can we make and how many explosive plays can we make out of those plays?”

On playing more consistently:

“That’s a football man. It’s up and down. As much as we want it to be all wins, this is a competitive league at the highest level. Yes, there are games we could’ve won and there are games we could’ve lost. Where we’re at, we still have a chance. That’s what we’re looking for coming into December. We’re coming down the backstretch of the season and we can control where we stand, as long as we win. We’re playing the Bengals, they are in front of us right now, so that’s one we have to get. Guess what? That’s the one we have this week. All of the emphasis is on this game. I’m really excited to go out there and compete these next few weeks with the guys to make our run.”

On preparing for a potential playoff spot:

“It gives you another reason to want to play even harder. Definitely being able to say that you’re in the hunt still is a little extra sugar on top. The main goal is to try to get all the way to the end. We’ve been in situations where we were out of the hunt. We’ve been in situations where we are in the hunt and making it to the playoffs. It’s just more things added to the plate where I feel very excited to come in and work with the guys. That’s what it goes back to for me. The whole ecosystem really gets me fired up, especially when we have a chance to go to the playoffs. It’s really special.”

On the timeline of moving on past a loss:

“For me, it’s not the loss, but that individual plays that I pull from that loss. I think to myself, ‘What if I did this on that play?’ Or, ‘What if I had taken an inside route or if I would have cut here?’ That really sticks with me. I think it sticks with me throughout the entire week and season. The loss, I get over that quickly. We’re going to win and lose some. It comes down to my individual plays where I could’ve really helped the team. It’s these plays I need to learn from so that I don’t repeat these mistakes later on in the season. It stays with me my entire career. For example, with the Vikings, I came across the middle and tipped the ball which led to a pick. Things like that. Plays stick with me more. The games? Just give me a couple of days. We have to move on.”

On being considered an 'elite running back':

"I don't even see it like that. My mindset has been the same since I was a rookie. It's about trying to build and keep building. I don't compare myself to anybody. Some people will compare me to other pass-catching backs when they try to talk football. For me, I can't focus on that. I started out on special teams. That was my role and I put everything into that role. Then, I started getting reps on offense. Then, I became a full-time offensive player. It's always been, 'How can I improve my game in this offense with the opportunities that I'm getting?' That's my role. When it comes to being in the building, it's about just doing my job. I have a role and I've built up this role to this point. I continue to try and build on it. I hate comparing myself to others because I try to be the best version of myself."

On his top accolade:

"My favorite stat is from my rookie year. I led the entire NFL in tackles on a punt in my rookie year. In my rookie year, I led the entire NFL. I remember the mindset that I had was that everything relies on me going down here and making this tackle. My livelihood in this league depended on this right now. That was how I approached the game. That's how I approached my preparation. That's why I was able to have success because I put everything into it. It carried over to everything else that I'm doing, not just football. It carries over to life. If you want something and you have the opportunity to take a risk and go get it, I think to myself, 'Let's go.'"

On S Derwin James Jr.:

"His leadership is what is most impressive to me, and how early of a leader he became for our team. It's his confidence and how he holds himself, how he plays and his preparation. Being prepared gives someone so much more confidence. His being a leader and the way that he approaches and loves the game shows. It is contagious, especially when he's on the field. It's different when he's injured. When he's here and on the field, people feed off of his energy, not just the defense, but also the offense because he's going to be talking, he's going to be yelling, he's going to be breaking us down. We need those guys that bring that type of energy. That is what you want to be around on gameday. Obviously, he's a great player, as well. However, what stands out to me the most is his personality and how that reflects into the locker room, as well."